DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 471 108 SO 034 441

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TITLE	Regional Teacher Training Seminar on "Teaching Materials: Controversial and Sensitive Issues, Multiperspectivity" (Ohrid, Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, May 6-8, 2001).
INSTITUTION	Council of Europe, Strasbourg (France).
PUB DATE	2001-05-00
NOTE	23p.; Organized by the Council of Europe, the Ministry of Education of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, the Council of Europe's Information Office in Skopje (Macedonia), and the European Standing Conference of History Teachers' Associations (EUROCLIO).
AVAILABLE FROM	Council of Europe, F67075 Strasbourg, Cedex, France. Tel: 33-3-88-41-20-00; Web site: http://www.coe.int. For full text: http://www.coe.int/ T/E/Cultural_Co-operation/education/History_Teaching/ .
PUB TYPE	Collected Works - Proceedings (021) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)
EDRS PRICE	EDRS Price MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS
DESCRIPTORS	*Controversial Issues (Course Content); *Educational Cooperation; Foreign Countries; Geographic Regions; *History Instruction; *History Textbooks; Seminars; *Teacher Education
IDENTIFIERS	*Europe (Southeast)

ABSTRACT

The May 2001 regional seminar on "Teaching Materials: Controversial and Sensitive Issues, Multiperspectivity," held in Ohrid, was included in the Stability Pact, with financing from Austria and Switzerland. It was the first regional teacher training seminar in this region. The seminar reviewed controversial and sensitive issues in textbooks of the 20th century. It discussed examples of multiperspectivity, one of the key issues to be discussed during the seminar working sessions. The seminar was organized to encourage debate and sharing of ideas. There was a general awareness of the importance of the seminar's work as a starting point of a process that could lead to the reform of history teaching within different education systems, considered a priority by all participants. This report consists of the following sections: (1) "Background to the Seminar"; (2) "Opening of the Seminar"; (3) "Keynote Presentation"; (4) "Working Groups"; and (5) "Participants' Perspectives on the Working Groups." Appendices contain the program and participant list. (BT)

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ED 471 108

Ohrid, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia", 6-8 May 2001

Regional Teacher Training Seminar on "Teaching materials: controversial and sensitive issues, multiperspectivity"

Report by Maria Luisa de BIVAR BLACK, Portugal

SO 034 441

Council of Europe
Strasbourg, France

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I. BACKGROUND TO THE SEMINAR

II. OPENING OF THE SEMINAR

III. KEYNOTE PRESENTATION

IV. WORKING GROUPS

V. THE PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORKING GROUPS

APPENDIX I - PROGRAMME OF THE SEMINAR

APPENDIX II - LIST OF PARTICIPANTS

I. BACKGROUND TO THE SEMINAR .

The Regional Seminar on "Teaching materials: controversial and sensitive issues, multiperspectivity" was included in the programme of activities approved by the Stability Pact, with financing from Austria and Switzerland. It was the first regional teacher training seminar in this region and was organised by:

- The Council of Europe (Education Policies and European Dimension Division - Directorate General IV, Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport);

- The Ministry of Education of "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia";

- The Council of Europe's Information Office in Skopje;

- EUROCLIO, the European Standing Conference of History Teachers' Associations.

The seminar was held in Ohrid, where, in a friendly atmosphere, history educators from different countries of South East Europe looked at controversial and sensitive issues in textbooks of the 20th Century, which they were invited to bring, and that they also critically evaluated.

The Council of Europe provided the participants with a selection of publications related to the theme of the seminar that included reports on previous seminars and also Dr Robert Stradling's Handbook on *Teaching 20th Century European History*, as it gave examples of good teaching practice for the question of multiperspectivity, which was one of the key issues to be discussed during the working sessions of the seminar.

The seminar was organised in such a way as to encourage debate and sharing of ideas. There was only one keynote presentation in the opening plenary session and the working sessions were then organised so that participants were divided into three different groups that attended three different workshops, where the animators gave examples of ways of dealing with controversial/sensitive issues in the classroom, showed how they used different resources, such as newspapers and photos, and encouraged active participation and debate.

Furthermore, there were two roundtable sessions where participants focused on sensitive issues related to South East European history, critically analysed textbooks, reached a consensus on their own set of problems and identified ways forward in reference to future work.

There was a general awareness of the importance of this seminar, namely as the starting point of a process that could lead to the reform of history teaching within different education systems, which was considered a priority by all participants.

II. OPENING OF THE SEMINAR .

The plenary session of 6 May was opened by Dr Nenad Novkovski, Minister of Education, who referred to the fact that "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" was a new country that wanted to join the European Union and was well aware that its education system had to change and include different principles and concepts. He further referred to the urgent need to organise an education system that would encourage cooperation among different peoples and communities. The final results of this seminar were considered important, and would be given consideration in the future reform of the education system.

Ms Alison Cardwell, on behalf of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, thanked Dr Novkovski and the Ministry of Education for accepting to organise the seminar, introduced the speakers and gave an overview of the aims and activities of the Council of Europe.

Ms Cardwell explained how the Council of Europe had been involved in different educational projects - (related to education for democratic citizenship, educational policies, higher education and modern languages) -and spoke about the project *Teaching and learning about the history of Europe in the 20th Century in Secondary Schools*, and referred to the existence of cooperation programmes that are being implemented at the request of some of the Council's new partner countries. There was cooperation with the Russian Federation - work on curricula and standards; preparation and publication of new history textbooks; initial and in-service training of history teachers; there was the "Tbilisi Initiative", which consisted of the preparation and publication of

a joint Caucasian history textbook (Armenia, Azerbaïjan, Georgia and the Russian Federation); finally, Ms Cardwell spoke about the "Black Sea Initiative", involving Bulgaria, Georgia, Moldova, Romania, the Russian Federation, Turkey and Ukraine.

Ms Cardwell also explained how the Stability Pact was financing projects on the training of history teachers, organised by the Council of Europe together with EUROCLIO, with the cooperation of other organisations such as the Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research and the Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in South East Europe. Ms Cardwell stressed the importance of the Stability Pact for the region, in enabling the organisation of such seminars, launched following the Conference on "The initial and in-service training of history teachers in South East Europe", Athens last September, the work of preparation and coordination that it involved, and of the possibilities for future events and initiatives. The development of these projects in South East Europe provided a good opportunity for all those involved in history education to debate and share ideas and to exchange experiences.

III. KEYNOTE PRESENTATION .

Ms Vivien Kelly, from Northern Ireland, spoke about the challenges of teaching history in a divided community. She explained how, in Northern Ireland, until the early 1990s, history teaching in the different religious communities reflected the beliefs of each community and how, before the 1970s, history teaching was quite "easy" as it clearly avoided the "Irish" themes.

Indeed, since the introduction of the new curriculum in 1992 - with changes in content and methodology (reflecting a balance between knowledge and skills) - a pro-active attitude had been adopted, so that history had become a dynamic subject that did not avoid controversial issues, such as the famine of the 17th Century or the political events of the 1920s, but tried to analyse how different groups saw these events, using a variety of sources, and distinguishing facts from opinions and propaganda.

Ms Kelly referred to the existence of funds to finance projects that aimed at education for mutual understanding and the

understanding and management of conflict. There were projects "across" the border, sometimes involving parents - "Our time-your time" project. There were school exchanges, many outdoor activities, museum visiting, etc. However, the question of what had been achieved should be raised, as it was arguable that the new curriculum could not reach the mutual understanding of the communities beyond the *level of politeness*.

There was no question that history teaching should be challenging, provoking and questioning, which is better achieved when controversial issues are included in the history curriculum, but, in the divided society of Northern Ireland, the problem of raising controversial issues lay mainly with adults. Indeed, in a divided society, where violence, death and destruction are common, where the wall murals, with their colour, language and slogans, define a territory and tell people who they are, myths become part of the identity of a person. Some studies show that, nearly 20 years after the introduction of new teaching methods, there has been no change in people's minds, mainly because the events have not supported history teaching and violence is in the streets everywhere, and each side sees itself as a victim.

However, as Ms Kelly pointed out, there is a huge difference in attitude when pupils are able to see beyond their *narrow* schools/communities, as they gain breadth and, in consequence, tolerance. Ms Vivien Kelly also stressed that, through communication, the world is becoming smaller and teachers are no longer the only source of knowledge and, at the same time, pupils are more informed and aware.

IV. WORKING GROUPS .

There were three different working groups, gathering people from different countries and/or regions to encourage sharing of different perspectives through debate.

Dialogue was not easy at the beginning, but once it started it was difficult to stop. Participants were eager to expose their own perspectives based on their own opinions and experiences and sometimes it was difficult to focus the attention of the participants on the work that had been planned.

The three animators organised different work, developing the theme of *Teaching materials: controversial and sensitive issues, multiperspectivity* through different methodology.

The main idea was that controversial issues should link the historical with the contemporary, thus constituting a powerful way of reasoning and coping with the present, raising challenging questions and making history teaching relevant for the students. The animators in their workshops introduced the question of how to deal with sensitive issues in the classroom, using some of the guidelines from Dr Robert Stradling's book, and how teachers should be aware that they are the product of society, subject to its influences, emotions and prejudices, which also affect the students and their parents, the historians and the media.

Ms Joke van der Leeuw-Roord brought examples of a German textbook and an English textbook that debated the question of the bombing of civilians during the Second World War. The perspectives and teaching methods of both textbooks were different and participants had to analyse and debate the materials and questions of the textbook examples, focusing their attention on the strong and weak points. Participants worked in small groups within the working group. Discussion followed the doubts that were raised and the different conclusions that had been reached.

Ms Luisa Black explained why de-colonisation was a very sensitive and controversial theme in Portuguese history and how it linked with the question of slavery, human rights and child labour. Different contradicting sources from Portuguese textbooks were used and the participants were asked to critically analyse these sources. The various questions raised by the participants were then discussed and a practical example on teaching about slavery was given.

Mr Henrik Skovgaard-Nielsen explained the concept of *critical historical consciousness* and stressed the importance of *relevance* in reference to the interest the students manifested in history. Learning history in the Gymnasium aims at a combined balance of acquiring knowledge and developing skills and understanding. This is a process that leads to the forming of a critical historical consciousness, which resulted from the on-going dialogue of understanding the present, interpretation of

the past and orientation to the future. The participants were able to work with concrete, controversial material from existing English books, on the outbreak of the First World War and the Versailles Conference, and also to understand the use and potential of other materials than just textbooks.

V. THE PARTICIPANTS' PERSPECTIVES ON THE WORKING GROUPS .

Discussions during the working group sessions raised many questions and reached some consensus.

TEXTBOOKS

· Different textbooks offer the position of the authors - a lot of textbooks are one sided.
· Textbooks should include a variety of sources.
· In the textbooks, perspectives regarding sensitive issues change according to interpretation.
· Emotion is often present in historical texts, it is important to recognise it and distinguish it from the facts.
· The presentation of a textbook is important (text, sources, pictures, maps and graphs) and the perspective of the student (and also his/her sensitivity) has to be taken into account.

TEACHING PRACTICE

· The way of addressing sensitive issues is crucial for a dynamic understanding of present situations.
· Sensitive issues should be approached in broader/international settings and then focus on the specific or national questions.
· When analysing sensitive issues, messages should be clear and unequivocal, and teachers should help students distinguish facts from opinions, avoid *rights* and *wrongs*.
· It is important to aim at involving students' attitudes (linking the past to the present); the three steps are to know, to interpret, to act (to take a stand).
· Controversial issues are not controversial in themselves; they are controversial for the society. This is a result not only of the fact that education is part of the system as a whole, but because it is involved in the production of historical consciousness; the better way to tackle this problem is not just to increase the

content, but also to give students tools for critical thinking, for analysing and interpreting diverging sources.
· There are several hurdles in teaching controversial issues:

- The financial burden (it is resource-intensive);
- It is conflicting with the usual curriculum and the tight time frame;
- The examination system;
- The political establishment and public sensitivity.

· Some of the solutions proposed:

- Teacher training (specially initial teacher training);
- The change of focus of examinations;
- Development of additional teaching materials.

THE ROUND TABLES

Two round table sessions were organised, where participants showed each other the textbooks they used, discussed the different perspectives with reference to the same events, compared content, (Balkan Wars and the First and Second World Wars), and curriculum and shared experiences.

A large consensus was reached regarding two main questions:

1) Textbooks;
2) Teacher training.

TEXTBOOKS

As the textbooks still in use were analysed and compared, it was possible to conclude that textbooks were very `one sided' as they lacked multiperspectivity, and that history was a `very political affair', as there was very little about people and a lot about wars. It was also quite clear that there were very few questions asked.

In consequence, all participants felt the need to have new textbooks that permitted the introduction of new teaching methods, namely active and enquiry- based learning, but they all agreed that there was a financial question that could not be avoided. In both roundtable sessions, there was general agreement on the need to have practising teachers co-operating

in the writing of the new textbooks as the `classroom' perspective, which included the students' perspective, had to be present in the textbook.

Although participants agreed on the urgent need for new textbooks and discussed what a good textbook might be, they also became aware that other sources could be used in the meantime, and agreed that the use of photographs, newspapers, oral history (family `archives'), video materials, old textbooks for comparison, etc. could be introduced more quickly.

The discussion of the textbook theme raised the question of the different teaching methods, which could only be developed if the curriculum was not so extensive and detailed. Some selection and cutting would have to be made, otherwise no active learning, enquiry-based teaching would be possible. As the theme was further deepened, participants agreed that a good textbook should include a teachers' guide and a students' handbook.

The possibility of co-operating with other countries in South East Europe, to prepare textbooks, in order to share some of the photos and sources and the research that it implied was raised and was put forward as a possible idea for future consideration.

TEACHER TRAINING

As the discussions progressed, there was a general consensus on the need to organise systematic teacher training, both initial and in-service training. Multiperspectivity, it was felt, was a new teaching concept that needed to be grasped and disseminated through training. One of the participants referred to the fact that, in a divided community, this is difficult, as each community explains problems from its own perspective and there is no mainstream.

Training takes time and costs money, but it is quite efficient. `*Teach teachers how to change methods*', one of the participants suggested, otherwise no change will take place. Furthermore, teachers have to feel involved in the changing process, in order to make good use of the new textbooks and implement the new methods: they are irreplaceable.

Participants were well aware that the changing process takes time as it implies teacher training, new textbooks and new curricula. Not only does it take time but it also involves political decision and considerable financing.

Participants felt that they needed both national and international in-service training, in order to share experiences and exchange ideas. Indeed, a lack of professional communication was generally felt and this seminar was a good opportunity to know how teachers from other countries were working and what sort of problems they were facing.

The freedom of the teacher within the curriculum was also discussed and participants felt that it was not realistic to have flexible curricula if the examination systems, based on facts, remain as they are. If this could change and examinations were to focus more on skills and not so much on the reproduction of knowledge, then flexibility would be interesting.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

In the closing session, Ms Alison Cardwell asked the participants to disseminate the ideas of this seminar as much as possible within their schools and among their colleagues, and gave an overview of planned future seminars. It is only in this way that change can be brought about as resources for seminars such as the one in Ohrid are limited.

Ms Joke van der Leeuw-Roord stressed how important it was to keep in contact with international developments and to participate in international seminars and referred to the importance of Internet in keeping up-to date and obtaining materials, lesson-plans, etc.

Participants were encouraged to visit Euroclio's homepage:
www.webeuroclio.com

Other useful homepages suggested were:
Center for Democracy and Reconciliation in Southeast Europe
www.cdsee.org

Georg Eckert Institute for International Textbook Research
www.gei.org

Mr Henrik Skovgaard-Nielsen reminded the participants of the important and still to be answered question - whether students understood that history could be interpreted in different ways or whether they thought that history was a package of facts that could not be challenged.

Ms Luisa Black, as general rapporteur, gave an overview of the main questions discussed during the two last days and reminded the participants of the interest of Dr Nenad Novkovski, Minister of Education, in the final results of the seminar as they would be given consideration in the reform of the education system in his country. She considered that the seminar had been successful and hoped - as the participants had indicated - that such seminars could continue to be organised. They are a valuable experience for all the participants and provide a good opportunity for history teachers and history educators from the countries of South East Europe to meet and exchange ideas and information.

APPENDIX I .

PROGRAMME OF THE SEMINAR .

Sunday 6 May 2001

Arrival of the participants

17.00 - 18h30 **Plenary Session**

Chair: Ms Violeta ACKOSA
Opening of the Seminar by:

i. Dr Nenad NOVKOVSKI PhD, Minister of Education;

ii. Ms Alison CARDWELL, Council of Europe;

Keynote presentation on "Teaching materials: controversial and sensitive issues, multiperspectivity" by Ms Vivien KELLY, Northern Ireland

Monday 7 May 2001

09.30 - 11.00 **SESSION I**

Working Group I on "Practical working methods on how to deal with sensitive issues"
Animator: Ms Joke VAN DER LEEUW-ROORD

Working Group II on "How can controversial and sensitive issues be dealt with in the classroom?
Animator: Ms Maria Luisa DE BIVAR BLACK

Working Group III on "Textbooks and teaching materials containing sensitive and controversial topics"
Animator: Mr Henrik SKOVGAARD-NIELSEN
(NB The Working Groups will be constituted by the organisers and the animators will circulate from one group to the other)

11.00 - 11.30 Break

11.30 - 12.30 **Round Tables on "Textbooks and Teaching Materials:**
Balkan Wars

World War I
World War II"
(NB: Two groups will discuss these topics and the discussions will be led by one of the animators in each group)

12.30 - 14h00 Lunch

14.30 - 16.00 **SESSION II - Working groups**

16.00 - 16.30 A visit to Ohrid

20.00 Official Dinner

Tuesday 8 May 2001

09.30 - 10.30 **SESSION III - Working groups**

10.30 - 11.00 Break

11.00 - 13.00 **Round Table on "Ways forward - what can be done with the existing materials?**
(NB: the two groups again with one animator to lead the discussions)

13.00 - 14.00 Lunch

14.00 - 15.30 Visit

15.30 - 16.30 **Plenary Session**

Chair: Ms Violeta ACKOSA
Presentation of the conclusions and recommendations by the rapporteurs of the **working groups** and the **round tables**
Comments by the specialists invited by the Council of Europe on the discussions held in the working groups in which they took part

Presentation by the General Rapporteur of the overall conclusions and recommendations of the Seminar

Comments by the participants

Closing speeches of the Seminar by:

i. Ms Alison CARDWELL, Educational Policies and European Dimension Division, Council of Europe;

ii. Ms Violeta ACKOSA, Faculty of History, Skopje.

Departure of the participants

APPENDIX II .

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